

OVOIDS

The waiting game.

BY DEBORAH WALKER

I watched the soldier through the attic window.

“Alice Petrag,” he shouted through his megaphone. I winced. I didn’t like him using my old name. “We want you to join us. You have the skills and knowledge we need.”

Fat chance of that. I wasn’t about to hide in an underground bunker with a bunch of cowards. That soldier didn’t know his real duty.

“Many of your fellow vigilantes have joined us,” he shouted. That was a lie; most of the army had joined the vigilantes. “We need you.” His voice trailed off. He seemed embarrassed. After an hour of pointless shouting, he returned to his truck for a cigarette and a coke, before driving off to the next town, to his next futile recruitment drive.

By half-past ten, I was home. That soldier had messed with my stuff, but he hadn’t taken anything. Perhaps I should’ve talked to him. After all, we both wanted the same thing. Maybe I could’ve recruited him to the vigilantes. I checked my laptop batteries and logged onto the net, which is still a place of wild speculation and meaningless distraction — no changes there. I logged onto *The Furies*. It’s good to keep contact with like-minded people. *The Furies* is a women-only forum. Although, admittedly, there’s no way of checking. I had lots of avatars. I used lots of different names.

I saw that StoneHeart was online, and I sent her a ‘hello’. I liked StoneHeart. She had a dry sense of humour. She replied, “Have you seen the new government messages? They’re embarrassing themselves.”

I pulled up the gov site. “Citizens, for your own safety, we urge you to relocate to an official underground facility. We are developing a cohesive strategy. We need every able-bodied person. Isolated, we will fail. If you are one of the so-called vigilante fighters, we urge you to reconsider. Join us. Together, we will succeed.”

The same old message, reworded every few weeks. “You’re right, StoneHeart. They’re an embarrassment.”

We messaged back and forth. I sent her the details of the acid that I’d concocted. It



seemed to have a mild effect on the ovoid shell.

Then she sent me a message that I didn’t like, at all. “I really would like to meet up sometime. You said you’re in Derbyshire. So am I.”

I logged off immediately.

My schedule was all wrong that morning. Instead of spending my time productively, I just paced up and down the garden. At 11.30 I forced myself into my chair for pattern observation. I felt better, surrounded by my weapons: knives, a chainsaw, various acids, a range of chemical mixes, commonplace and more esoteric. A barrel of water — you never know. Then there was the flame-thrower. I had a *really* good feeling about the flame-thrower.

I charted the movements on the ovoid’s surface, downloading the data for a group that monitored the patterns. Some vigilantes worked in teams, had their own bunkers. I didn’t mind sharing my data with them — but I worked alone.

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A message from StoneHeart flicked up. That girl couldn’t take a hint. I deleted the

message without reading it.

Then it was noon and time for lunch. I heated a can of chicken stew. I had a very tight schedule: exercises, research, weapons training, all within sight of the ovoid.

After lunch it was time: the half-hour I allowed myself to think about the past.

I touched the ovoid skin, felt its warmth. How strange it was. It consumed my life, now. When I was a kid, it was a different story. The ovoid in our garden was nothing more than an unremarkable place for me to hide during hide and seek.

“Why do you always choose that place?” Mary would ask. “You know it’s the first place that I look.” Familiarity had bred indifference. The ovoids were only odd shapes that had grown over the world a generation ago. They didn’t *do* anything.

Until their Daddies came.

Ten years ago, we stared at the sky-filling, thrashing shapes, at the mountains of twisting spawning flesh. It took them two years to complete what must have been, for them, a spasm of reproductive ecstasy. They were indifferent to our desperate weapons.

When they came, their gametes hung for days, darkening the sky. Until, urged by some unseen stimulus, they smashed through our tissue-paper world, our fragile lives.

I sat in front of my ruined home: somewhere, underneath the rubble, were the bodies of my mother, my father and Mary. A small percentage of the gametes even reached their intended destination and fertilized the waiting ovoids.

I was one of the lucky ones. Now, I wait. My weapons are at my side.

I deleted another message from StoneHeart. She was becoming a nuisance. I would change my avatar and my name. Then she wouldn’t be able to find me.

I’m waiting. I will allow no distractions. I’m waiting for the ovoid to crack, for the offspring to be born.

And, when it emerges, there will be nowhere for it to hide. ■

Find Deborah in the British Museum, trawling the past for future inspiration.

JACEY